



[Karl “Renegade” Kautsky, 1854-1938](#)

The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky

Note on the October Revolution: Our review of the Marxist classics includes original material from before and after the proletarian Russian Revolution of October 1917, but no account of the revolution itself.

One famous eye-witness account is that of **John Reed**, called [“Ten Days that Shook the World”](#), first published in 1919.

Lenin’s Introduction to Reed’s book says:

“With the greatest interest and with never slackening attention I read John Reed’s book, Ten Days that Shook the World. Unreservedly do I recommend it to the workers of the world. Here is a book which I should like to see published in millions of copies and translated into all languages. It gives a truthful and most vivid exposition of

the events so significant to the comprehension of what really is the Proletarian Revolution and the Dictatorship of the Proletariat. These problems are widely discussed, but before one can accept or reject these ideas, he must understand the full significance of his decision. John Reed's book will undoubtedly help to clear this question, which is the fundamental problem of the international labor movement."

Another famous [History of the Russian Revolution](#) was written in 1918 by **Leon Trotsky**. Here is an extract from Trotsky's account relating to May and June of 1917, in between revolutions:

"Almost all the articles, without exception, in all the official and semi-official organs were directed against the Bolsheviks. There was scarcely a charge, scarcely a calumny, that was not levelled against us in that period. Of course, the leading role in this campaign was played by the Cadet bourgeoisie, whose class instinct led it to recognize that the question at issue was not merely the offensive, but the entire further course of the Revolution and, in the first place, the form of Government authority. The whole bourgeois machinery for manufacturing 'public opinion' was put into motion at full steam. All the Government offices and institutions, publications, public platforms, and university chairs were drawn into the service of this one general aim: of making the Bolsheviks impossible as a political party. In this concentrated effort and in this dramatic newspaper campaign against the Bolsheviks were already contained the first germs of the civil war which was bound to accompany the next phase of the Revolution. The

sole aim of all this incitement and slander was to create an impenetrable wall of estrangement and enmity between the labouring masses on the one hand and 'educated society' on the other.

"The Liberal bourgeoisie understood that it could not win the support of the masses without the help of the lower middle-class democrats, who, as we pointed out above, had temporarily become the leaders of the revolutionary organizations. Consequently, the immediate aim of the political incitements against the Bolsheviks was to bring about an irreconcilable feeling of enmity between our party and the wide ranks of the Socialist intellectuals, who, having broken away from the proletariat, could not but fall into political bondage to the Liberal bourgeoisie."

The Renegade Kautsky

In 1881, two years before Karl Marx's death, **Karl Kautsky**, a young intellectual from Germany, went to visit Marx and Frederick Engels in London. Kautsky subsequently acquired a reputation as the "Pope" of communism. Lenin called him "*the ideological leader of the Second International*." Kautsky became the principal leader of the German Social Democrats at a time when the German party was far larger and more highly-developed than any other socialist party in the world.

Lenin had difficulties with the German Social-Democrats in the early 1900s, as we have already seen in this course. Among these German Social-Democrats, the person who was bold enough to challenge Lenin openly was Rosa Luxemburg, and Lenin answered her directly. They remained comrades. Lenin later quoted Rosa in "The April Theses" (1917), in a very critical

moment. Rosa and the Spartacists, like Lenin and the Bolsheviks, had by then opposed the Imperialist war without any hesitation.

Kautsky had been less prominent during the earlier controversies but by 1914 he was one of those mainly responsible for the open betrayal of anti-Imperialist working-class internationalism. This was when the German Social-Democrats, under Kautsky's leadership, backed their bourgeois-Imperialist government in its catastrophic war against England and France, whose equally craven Social-Democrats, in turn, also backed their bourgeois-Imperialist governments. Lenin called this kind of betrayal "Social-Imperialism".

["The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky"](#) (see the compilation of Chapters 1, 2 and 3 attached, and linked below) is a response to a 1918 pamphlet written by Kautsky called ["The Dictatorship of the Proletariat"](#), which was an attack on the Russian Bolsheviks, as well as a betrayal of Marx.

In Chapter 1 of "The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky", Lenin takes Kautsky's general argument, deals with it, and then makes the following definitions:

"Dictatorship is rule based directly upon force and unrestricted by any laws."

"The revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat is rule won and maintained by the use of violence by the proletariat against the bourgeoisie, rule that is unrestricted by any laws."

In other words, the Revolution does not ask permission, and it

does not apologise. The Revolution breaks the old rules, and it makes new, revolutionary rules. This is the part of revolution that the bourgeoisie particularly dislikes, as we can see in South Africa, today. In Chapter 2, Lenin notes:

“Kautsky takes from Marxism what is acceptable to the liberals, to the bourgeoisie (the criticism of the Middle Ages, and the progressive historical role of capitalism in general and of capitalist democracy in particular), and discards, passes over in silence, glosses over all that in Marxism which is unacceptable to the bourgeoisie (the revolutionary violence of the proletariat against the bourgeoisie for the latter’s destruction). That is why Kautsky, by virtue of his objective position and irrespective of what his subjective convictions may be, inevitably proves to be a lackey of the bourgeoisie.”

We still have many such “Marxists”, of the Kautsky kind, even in South Africa.

In Chapter 3, Lenin sharpens the point as follows:

“If the exploiters are defeated in one country only—and this, of course, is typical, since a simultaneous revolution in a number of countries is a rare exception—they still remain stronger than the exploited, for the international connections of the exploiters are enormous. That a section of the exploited from the least advanced middle-peasant, artisan and similar groups of the population may, and indeed does, follow the exploiters has been proved by all revolutions, including the Commune (for there were also proletarians among the Versailles troops, which the most

learned Kautsky has “forgotten”).

“In these circumstances, to assume that in a revolution which is at all profound and serious the issue is decided simply by the relation between the majority and the minority is the acme of stupidity, the silliest prejudice of a common liberal, an attempt to deceive the people by concealing from them a well-established historical truth. This historical truth is that in every profound revolution, the prolonged, stubborn and desperate resistance of the exploiters, who for a number of years retain important practical advantages over the exploited, is the rule. Never—except in the sentimental fantasies of the sentimental fool Kautsky—will the exploiters submit to the decision of the exploited majority without trying to make use of their advantages in a last desperate battle, or series of battles.

“The transition from capitalism to communism takes an entire historical epoch. Until this epoch is over, the exploiters inevitably cherish the hope of restoration, and this hope turns into attempts at restoration.”

Not even Lenin’s Great October Soviet Socialist Revolution was automatically permanent.

This classic work is easy to read and is full of lessons that are applicable today.

- The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky, 1918, Lenin.](#)
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